Chapter 8 –Southwest IN: Region 2 Findings
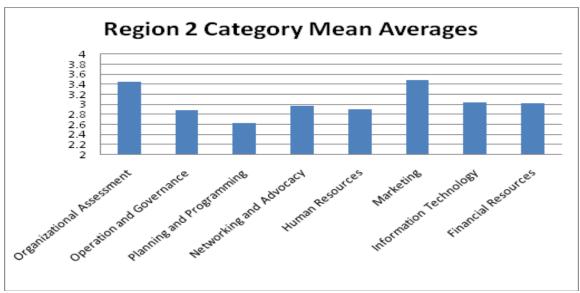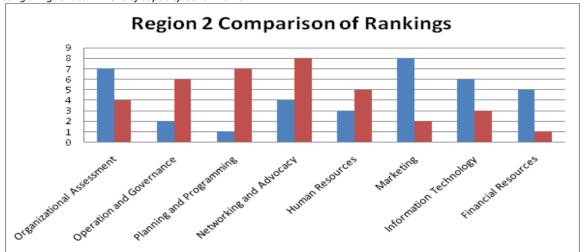
Region 2, the Southwest region of the state, is a geographically vast and diverse area, stretching from the Indianapolis suburbs to downtown Evansville, from Bloomington to Terre Haute. Of the 16 responses to the survey from the counties in this region, 15 completed the survey with full data sets that could be analyzed. While representing only 15.3% of the total response, Region 2 participants show some distinct features in comparison to statewide respondents. Interestingly, Region 2 as a whole contains some of the poorest parts of the state, with a mix of urban, generational, and rural poverty, to a degree more evident than in other parts of the state.

The Region 2 organizations serve various audiences—families, adult men and women, and children of all school ages, as well as a few organizations focusing on senior citizens. While several organizations answered that they had received funding from the State of Indiana, a few indicated that they were unaware of the kinds of grant opportunities that were open to them at the state level. The types of services provided truly show the diverse nature of social service groups in the area—with pre-K-12 education, health, and mentoring leading the way among respondents, and such services as adult education, pregnancy testing, and HIV/AIDS screening, as well as groups hosting prison re-entry and substance abuse programs. The mixture of both urban and rural poverty issues is what made the group of Region 2 respondents quite interesting, but at the same time, quite challenging to assess as a group.

It is to be expected that in such a large region, with cities such as Bloomington, Evansville, and Terre Haute, as well as smaller towns, such as Jasper, Rockville, and Brazil, to have a real sense of "difference" between urban, suburban, and rural populations. While not being able to reflect on the region as a whole, comparing these 15 organizations from different areas gives input into the idea that organizations, even those serving similar populations, will differ in needs based on the assets and makeup of their localities.

Graph 8.1: *Shows the categorical mean averages of Southwest Indiana. All scores on are a scale of 0-4 with a higher score reflecting a higher attainment of capacity benchmarks.*

Graph 8.2: *Shows the comparison of the rankings between the categorical scores from the survey sections and question 10.1 in which respondents were asked to rank the areas of capacity from least challenging to most challenging using numbers 1-8. A higher number reflects either a higher capacity or a perceived higher capacity.*

Ch. 8. 1 – Strengths

Graph 8.1 above shows that Region 2 respondents' scores are at least a 2.5 in every category,

showing that their capacity is not incredibly low in any area. Most scores hover right around 3.0 on the

tipping point between achieving the minimum standard of best practice or not. Region 2 groups, like the

rest of the state's participants, have a high capacity in Marketing, with an average score of 3.48 out of

4.0, and in Organizational Assessment, with an average score of 3.45. These are two of the most

important categories in effective nonprofit management—to attract interest and to make sure that

what you're organization is doing is putting you on the right track to serve and succeed. By doing these two things well, the Region 2 respondents set themselves up to be in position to expand in other categories with solid foundations. Additionally, Region 2 scores well in Information Technology and Financial Resources (even though Financial Resources was the region's highest priority concern as seen in Graph 8.2 above). These categories have a high amount of correlation among statewide respondents, tending to follow that as the amount of fiscal ability an organization has increases, so does their access and ability to utilize information technology. Furthermore, these resources, of course, have major impacts on how well an organization can market itself to volunteers, potential donors, and community partners. One of the greatest strengths of Region 2 participants is the translation of capital—whether human, social, financial, or otherwise--into useable resources—like marketing campaigns—that can further expand those resources.

Ch. 8.2 – Challenges

While Region 2 organizations have two areas of incredible strength—Marketing and Organizational Assessment—they did have their weaknesses as well. The organizations in Region 2 scored lowest in Planning and Programming, with an average of 2.625. The scores are particularly low for question 4.2 asking if the organization has a strategic plan and question 4.3 about getting input from all stakeholders in program development—including service providers, community members, board members, and the population served. Even though the organizations that took the survey had highly ranked Organizational Assessment skills, the struggle of turning that into a plan as well as including input from all sources during that process are evident. This could perhaps be due to the relatively small size of Region 2 respondent organizations, mostly under 5 people, which simply do not have the available staff time to devote to a strategic plan.

The lack of a strategic plan could boil down to another source—a lack of board oversight into organizational strategy. Because of the low capacity score of the Region 2 organizations' Operations and

Governance scores, this idea may have some merit. This is not unique to Region 2 organizations, nor is it unheard of or old news for small nonprofits. Unfortunately, once again due to the small size of the organizations that responded, many boards fill an "operational" role rather than a "strategic" role—a line blending that can distort responsibilities. Additionally, a lack proper controls that many larger organizations' boards may have done can lead to issues. It is not that anyone on the board is doing anything wrong—but rather that there may be an issue with time allotted for planning and board training. This is incredibly difficult in a small nonprofit, where both time and money come at a premium.

Ch. 8.3 – Solutions

Survey respondents from Region 2 show a commitment to core issues, but a lack of translating those strengths into real organizational capacity building. After meeting with most of the organizations in this region that responded to the survey, there is a sense that some the managers are capable, but overwhelmed when it comes to the strategic element. Others struggle with finding appropriate avenues of assistance, and working with the VISTA initiative seems to be an appropriate method of addressing those needs. The respondents in Region 2 have the assets and the solid foundation on which to build a better outlook for themselves and their constituents, but making those connections to existing community assets has proven to be difficult, as it can be for all small nonprofits.

With these results in mind, there are several steps that the respondents in Region 2 can take to build their capacity. First, their appraisal skills can be used to re-evaluate program development and board governance by charging their board members with the responsibility of strategy. Region 2 groups can increase accountability by including all stakeholders in this process, especially their clients. This can also be done not by hiring a strategic planner, which can be prohibitively expensive, but by finding a strategic planner to serve on their board itself. Additionally, great sources for skilled volunteers are college students, so these nonprofits can look to the many academic institutions in Region 2. By collaborating with partners at these institutions, a long-term supply of skilled individuals can assist with

shortfalls like social media, financial management, and grant proposal writing. If skilled volunteers cannot be found, Region 2 should strongly consider increasing the use of nonprofit intermediaries, such as the Indiana Nonprofit Resource Network (INRN) or local foundations, as resources through which to network with nonprofits of similar size, scope, interest, and mission.

The Region 2 respondents have a unique background—a small-town mentality of helping each other out with a series of social and political issues that are usually reserved for big cities. The small nonprofits that responded are a mostly volunteer run sector, which makes committed long-term change difficult. Overall, the Region 2 respondents have great promise to reach a higher capacity because of their solid foundations, yet they must commit to that change.

Ch. 8.4 – Additional Region 2 Resources

INRN Southern Region: https://www.unitedwayswi.org/programs_services.php?page=ind_nfp_network
    (Region 2 Counties Served: Crawford, Daviess, Dubois, Gibson, Greene, Knox, Lawrence,
    Martin, Monroe, Orange, Perry, Pike, Posey, Spencer, Vanderburgh, Warrick)
INRN Western Region: http://www.inrn.org/west/west.htm
    (Region 2 Counties Served: Clay, Sullivan, Vigo, Vermillion, Parke, Putnam, Owen)
Nonprofit Alliance of Monroe County: http://npamc.org/
United Way of the Wabash Valley (Vigo, Vermillion, Parke, Clay, Sullivan): http://www.uwwv.org/
United Way of Southwestern Indiana (Vanderburgh, Warrick, Spencer): http://www.unitedwayswi.org/
United Way of Monroe County (Monroe, Owen, Greene): http://www.monroeunitedway.org/
United Way of South Central Indiana (Lawrence): http://www.unitedwaysci.org/
United Way of Daviess County: http://www.dcunitedway.org/
United Way of Knox County: http://www.unitedwayofknoxcounty.org/